

NORWAY

Urnes Stave Church

Brief description

The wooden church of Urnes (the *stavkirke*) stands in the natural setting of Sogn og Fjordane. It was built in the 12th Century and is an outstanding example of traditional North-Western European wooden architecture. It brings together traces of Celtic art, Viking traditions and Romanesque spatial structures.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription **1979**

Agency responsible for site management

- Fortidsminneforeningen - The Society of Norwegian Ancient Monuments
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2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria **C (i), (ii), (iii)**

Justification provided by the State Party

Among Norway's thirty preserved stave churches Urnes is exceptional: architectonically, art historically, and as a source of information. The stave churches are normally considered the most interesting, highly developed wooden buildings in the Western European cultural sphere. They continue a tradition of wooden architecture, at one time common to large parts of Europe, but almost lost today. Of the preserved Norwegian stave churches, Urnes shows the best craftsmanship, and some especially fine wood carving. In a class by themselves are the carved remains from the older buildings. This construction of the 11th century clearly had a monumental decoration of outstanding quality.

Urnes Stave Church represents the most important specimen of the Stave churches, a unique and wooden construction -- no Stave church has survived in other European countries. [It is also of unique artistic achievement with wooden carvings from 11th century. (cf. 5a i, iii)] [bracketed sentence added as part of supplementary information provided 26/02/1979]

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Urnes church can be selected to represent this outstanding series of wood buildings on the World Heritage List for a number of reasons, which make it an exceptional monument.

-Its antiquity: this church, which was rebuilt toward the middle of the 12th century, includes some elements originating from a stave church built about one century earlier whose location was revealed by the 1956-1957 excavations.

-The exemplary nature of its structure which is characterized by the use of cylindrical columns with cubic capitals and semicircular arches, all of which use wood, the indigenous building material to express the language of stone Romanesque architecture.

-The outstanding quality of its sculpted monumental decor which, especially on the outside, includes strap-work panels and elements of Viking tradition taken from the preceding building (11th century) and inside an amazing series of 12th century figurative capitals which constitute the origin of the "Urnes style production".

-The wealth of liturgical objects of the medieval period: Christ, the virgin and St. John, elements of a rood beam, a cathedral of sculpted wood, enamelled bronze candlesticks, the corona of light, etc.

-Excellent conservation of a perfectly homogeneous ensemble. The embellishments of the 17th century (1601 and ca. 1700) and the restorations of 1906-1910 totally observed its authenticity.

-The location of the church within the remarkable backdrop of a glacial valley on the north bank of Sognefjord.

ICOMOS recommends the inclusion of Urnes church on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II and III.

Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of Significance by ICOMOS adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site
- State Party has not stated if the ICOMOS text is considered to be the official statement of significance
- UNESCO official description of site should be improved; State Party has provided suggestion

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: not adequate
- Buffer zone: a buffer zone has been defined

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained
- No foreseen changes

3. Protection**Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- The Cultural Heritage Act §4, regulations in a land-use plan with special zoning requirements
- The protection arrangements are considered highly effective

4. Management**Use of site/property**

- Visitor attraction (entrance fee), religious use, concerts

Management/Administrative Body

- Steering group: mutual information between stakeholders and bodies involved, coordination of initiatives and efforts. To oversee that suggested improvements are handled by the authorities in charge. To be a forum for discussions on tasks and matters that affects the World Heritage
- Formally constituted
- Management by the State Party; management under protective legislation
- Site manager on part-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national, local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

5. Management Plan

- No management plan
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: the Directorate for Cultural Heritage

6. Financial Resources**Financial situation**

- State budget, Fortidsminneforeningen - The Society of Norwegian Ancient Monuments
- Extra funding has been drawn from World Heritage status

- Resources from the State Party provide an annual budget for taking care of Norwegian World Heritage sites
- Funding available for the adequate management of the site: sufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- One person part-time (30%) all year. Two guides during summer season

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation
- Good: management, promotion, interpretation
- Average: education, visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- NIKU and the Directorate for Cultural Heritage can be consulted when special needs occur

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 13,898 in 2004 - tendency increasing
- Visitor facilities: shop selling tickets, books, postcards, free information leaflet, lavatories, summer café is located near by
- No tourism/visitor management plan

10. Scientific Studies

- Studies related to the value of the site, condition surveys, archaeological surveys
- As sources to deeper knowledge on the object. To analyze the vulnerability of the object, thus defining limits to public access etc. As base for current maintenance and conservation work

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An adequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- No special events and exhibitions concerning the site's World Heritage status
- Web site available
- Local participation

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- No major interventions, except for ordinary maintenance, which includes treating walls and roofs with tar every third to tenth year (vary due to sun exposure, south vs. north). One corner pole (stave) is partially been repaired due to humidity and thus fungus attack. The stone foundation under the northern wall has partially collapsed
- Present state of conservation: good

Threats and Risks to site

- Number of inhabitants
- Specific issues if mentioned: The population of the settlement is decreasing, now being only 39 elder people. The community may be depopulated, totally or major part of the year. Fire, there is a long distance to fire station. Vandalism, included acts of satanic crime. Looting of interior items (though most of them are copies)

Actions taken

- A project dedicated to the problems which are common for all the settlements on the southern shores of Lustrafjord is established, with joint interests. Permanent settlement is considered to be preventive to the threats of fire, vandalism and looting.

13. Monitoring

- Formal monitoring programme
- Measures taken/planned: video cameras, providing surveillance from different angles. Fire detection system

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: social, economic
- Strengths: strengthened awareness and knowledge among the public. Increased consciousness and pride provides better caretaking. Attention internationally. State grants. A visitor centre
- Weaknesses of management: the vulnerability of the wood materials, hence the wear and tear through the use of the church, especially if the inrush of visitors/tourists will increase from the present level

Future actions

- Because of its vast location access to the church is somehow limited. Deliberately there are no plans for actions to ease its accessibility, rather to improve the facilities for those who are really dedicated
- Activity does not require funding from World Heritage Fund